

**2020-2021 Baltimore County Commission for Women Planning Meeting**  
**Thursday, August 20, 2020**

**1. Call to Order:** 6:09 p.m.

**Present:** Amy Blank, Audrey Potter, Bailey Susic, Brenda Savoy, Carmen Christiana, Cherie Peay, Frances R. Smith, Helene H. Waranch, Jennifer Scott, Nitsa Stakias Zdziera, Renee McGuirk-Spence, Rosalyn Berkowitz, Ruth Howard, Sabrina Jones, Sharon Kehnemui, Sheila Derman, Teresa Messer, Yvette Hicks

**Absent:** Cecilia Myrick, Cheryl Brooks, Dorothy Foos

**2. Minutes**

Motion to accept the minutes seconded and passed by acclamation.

**3. Treasurer's Report**

The commission incurred expenses tied to the 2019-2020 agenda for events that had been scheduled in the summertime but cancelled. The commission paid \$600 for the cost of food and gifts for the Woman of the Year awards ceremony and \$200 for a lost deposit on the hotel space to host the Centennial Celebration. The fiscal year ended on June 30. These expenses were assigned to the 2019-2020 budget. The commission ended its 2019-2020 with \$6,675.25 remaining in the \$10,000 budget.

Because of COVID, the county's revenues have been severely reduced. As a result, the commission budget for 2021 is \$5,000, half of the total budget of the prior year. This will mean severe cuts to functions and activities of the commission. The prior-year budget was revisited as a reminder to committee members of the allocation of spending:

- Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW) Membership – \$75
- MLAW Meeting Attendance Registrations — \$200
- National Association of Women's Commission (NAWC) Membership - \$150
- Annual Women of the Year Awards— \$3,000
- Women's Health Fair — \$400
- Voices of Baltimore County Women's Initiative — \$3150.00 (\$450 per district)
- Committee on Domestic Violence — \$800
- Women's Suffrage 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event — \$1900
- Member Nametags – \$200
- Miscellaneous — \$125

With the Voices of Baltimore County Women's Initiative going online, the Women's Suffrage event being cancelled and other in-person events in limbo, as well as the addition of new committees, each committee chairwoman was asked to come to the September meeting with a proposed budget with the understanding that the total commission budget is now \$5,000.

**4. President's Report**

President Howard asked everyone to offer their contributions to write up the annual report. Commissioners mentioned the following items:

- Commissioner Berkowitz's leadership in getting the felony strangulation law on the books in Annapolis (the commissioner spoke to many lawmakers and testified at legislative hearings).
- Several other commission-supported legislative proposals were signed into law.
- The first online health webinar was held in place of an in-person event.
- Three Voices of Baltimore County Women Initiative Conversations were held before COVID shut down the county.
- Several new commissioners joined the commission.
- Commissioners improved communications between the commission and the county council members and the community.

## **5. 2020-2021 Committee Preview**

### **A. Human Trafficking Work Group/Chairwoman: Commissioner Berkowitz**

Commissioner Berkowitz reported that the work group had not met in two months, but she will be communicating with members soon to get a revised schedule.

### **B. Voices of Baltimore County Women Initiative/Chairwoman: President Howard**

President Howard urged the commissioners appointed by the remaining four districts that had not held their event before COVID to communicate with their council members to select new dates to pick up the events. The events will now be done on Zoom. They need to be completed by the end of the year so a report can be given to the county executive and council members with suggestions for priority initiatives for county women in the coming years.

The commissioners listed the months when they would like to schedule their events.

1. District 1 Commissioner McGuirk-Spence - December
2. District 2 Commissioner Derman (working with Commissioner Waranch) – late October
3. District 3 Commissioner Smith (working with Commissioner Blank) - October
5. District 5 Commissioner Stakias Zdziera said she will approach her council member first and provide two dates before 2021.

Liaison Christiana reminded commissioners that the county executive has outreach coordinators for each district, and they will help distribute invitations and build audience participation.

### **C. Public Policy Agenda/Chairwoman: Commissioner Blank**

Commissioner Blank said the short-term public policy priorities are to promote voter registration and to fill out the 2020 Census. Voters must register by Oct. 3 to vote on Election Day, Nov. 3.

Voter registration will be promoted through a "Sign Up to Be Counted" get-out-the-vote campaign that ties back into the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's right to vote. Commissioners emphasized the need to speak with senior centers to ensure they are prepared for voting day so that every vote is heard.

Commissioner Blank said she also wishes to work in tandem with county departments to promote these campaigns. She added that she would like to meet with state legislators and lobbyists to see their agendas for the coming year. Commissioner Blank said that she would reach out to MLAW and other organizations to put together an agenda for the commission to support and share with council members and state legislators. Commissioner Smith said she would like attention on legislative matters to focus on county-level priorities.

#### **D. Domestic Violence/Chairwoman: Commissioner Berkowitz**

Commissioner Berkowitz said that she is working on finding new channels for distributing resources to address domestic violence as there is now a well-documented rise in cases in the county as a result of everyone being stuck at home with their abusers. Commissioners discussed placing matchbooks and cards in the ladies rooms in grocery stores and leaving materials at food drop-offs and churches.

Another goal is to host a webinar with a panel discussion. Commissioner Scott suggested offering some legislative proposals like "Duty to Report" foster care abuse, child abuse, and adult domestic violence but Commissioner Berkowitz said that a Good Samaritan type of law for adult violence causes an increase in violence because abusers accuse their victims of reporting them when it is actually third parties reporting. Advocates prefer that victims come forward on her own after they get into a safe environment.

Commissioner Berkowitz said there had been a huge increase in the number of child abuse cases in the county though Commissioner Scott said the city has had a drop-off in reports of child abuse. Commissioner Berkowitz noted that it is already mandatory to report child abuse.

#### **E. Women's Health/Chairwoman: Commissioner Jones**

Commissioner Jones said that the first online health fair was put together over the summer in an extremely short period of time and 58 people attended. She said that she would like the commission to co-host quarterly health meetings, but the committee will first work on developing topics and speakers.

#### **F. Women of the Year/Chairwoman: Commissioner Peay**

Commissioner Peay said that because the awards ceremony was cancelled this summer, she would like to come up with a way to publicly acknowledge past winners, perhaps through a virtual celebration. Commissioner Jones suggested acknowledging the winners by doing something in the moment like a drive-by parade in which commissioners and winners could invite as many people as they like. Another option would be mounting banners or yard signs on winners' property or in other locations.

Commissioner Peay said she wishes to build a rubric that can be used as a consistent format for judging nominees. This could be a scoring system based on resume, community service, and other variables. Another option is to create an ongoing nomination process rather than having a small window of time for nominations each winter. Commissioner Peay said she would like the committee to meet every first Tuesday of the month.

#### **G. 2020 Women's Suffrage Centennial Conference/Chairwoman: Commissioner Waranch**

Commissioner Waranch said that as a result of COVID, the commission has lost its window of opportunity to host an event despite the county executive's interest in making the topic part of his agenda. She suggested putting the celebration on the back burner until society returns to an environment where an in-person celebration supporting an historic event could be held.

She added that the committee tried to shift the focus to online events but the resonant topic kept returning to GOTV efforts and working with other's women's organizations but that has now been moved into the public policy committee. Commissioner Waranch said that since the

commission is no longer needed, it will disband until there is another celebratory opportunity that makes sense.

#### **H. Prison Reform Exploration/Chairwoman: Commissioner Peay**

This is a new committee this year. Commissioner Peay said the Maryland Commission for Women had talked about prison reform in the past and Commissioner Peay had looked through the Maryland state website's sections on prison reform in order to narrow down a potential scope for the committee since reform issues transcend state and county jurisdictions. She said she placed a call with the director of the Baltimore County Detention Center Gail Watts and sent a query to Councilwoman Bevins about countywide issues and what is being done locally with regard to prison reform or re-entry of prisoners into Baltimore County. She said the committee had not decided yet on whether to narrow down the specific population to women only or address the impact of reform on both men and women.

Commissioner Peay said the prison system is very territorial and the commission wants to make sure it stays in its appropriate lane so she would prefer to wait to offer proposals until after she has a conversation with Director Watts. However, she noted that more women are serving time within their communities because the state budget is so tight that there's barely money for facilities. In fact, a lot of facilities have closed, which leaves everyone remaining in the system crammed together, whether in pre-trial detention, pre-release, or maximum security. This is overwhelming the current system.

Commissioner Blank added that COVID issues are an immediate concern in the prison system.

#### **I. PR and Social Media/Chairwoman: Commissioner Kehnemui**

This is a new committee this year. Commissioners Kehnemui and Susic brought up several areas of interest for this committee, the first being that it will provide branded templates for invitations, announcements, flyers, and other marketing materials which committees can use to announce campaigns and events. The committee requested that each committee assign a point-person to work with on the timing and messaging of marketing assets associated with their committees' events.

Second, the committee will collect and maintain email lists so that it can distribute marketing materials after they get final approval. The committee currently has a MailChimp account for distributing emails.

Third, the committee will maintain and operate the commission's Facebook page and would like to feature issues of public interest, committee activities, profiles of the commissioners, and notices of available county resources. The committee would also like to have a budget to boost posts to increase awareness of county resources and commission activities. The committee proposed creating its own budget to allocate advertising for events, resources, and campaigns, however, the commissioners noted that the other committees may wish to allocate a portion of their budgets to promotions and marketing.

Last, the committee members proposed hiring an unpaid intern who could help build media assets in support of other committees' functions and post to the Facebook page. Commissioner Kehnemui pointed out that a \$5 daily Facebook advertising campaign would cost about \$1,825 and that does not include costs of producing nondigital assets to promote events, for example posters or direct mailings. This may be too large a chunk of the \$5,000 annual budget so she requested that committee chairwoman consider their committees' budgets and what portion could be set aside for marketing and promotions of their events.

**6. Announcements**

The next commission meeting will be held on Thursday, September 17, 2020, at 6:00 p.m.

**7. Adjournment 7:55 p.m.**